

PROPERTY PLANNING COMMON ELEMENTS

COMPONENTS OF MASTER PLANS

RECREATION ACTIVITIES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

Hunting

Desired Experiences and Site Selection Considerations

Hunting is part of Wisconsin's heritage and provides opportunities for building or continuing family traditions. Most hunters prefer to hunt in solitude with few distractions from other outdoor recreation participants or other sounds. Hunting does not require much infrastructure, other than access points (parking areas). Hunter walking trails and woods roads are commonly utilized both as places to hunt from and to move large game to vehicles. Habitat is a key component that affects the quality of the hunt. Weather conditions, such as snow cover, rain and wind, can substantially affect hunting success.

Four types of hunting are described here: big game, small game, migratory bird, and turkey.

Big Game

Big game hunting primarily comprises white-tailed deer and black bear. Most Wisconsin deer hunters choose to hunt with a firearm; however, hunting with archery and crossbow equipment continues to gain in popularity. Most deer hunters prefer to hunt in solitude with no interruption from other outdoor recreation participants. Hunting from portable tree stands is common on public and private lands and most hunters prefer to have relatively easy access to their favorite deer hunting spots. Deer hunters are often willing to travel several hours to a favorite hunting spot (and cabin or deer-camp), and the atmosphere, camaraderie, and setting of the hunt are important components of the overall experience.

Bear hunters typically hunt over bait used to attract bears within shooting range, or use hounds to pursue and harvest bears. The amount and type of allowable bait for bear hunting is regulated. Like most other hunters, bear hunters prefer solitude while hunting; however, hunting with hounds can be more of a social experience involving groups of family members and friends. Access to large areas of hunting land is important for bear hunting with hounds, while those that hunt with bait may use smaller tracts of land. Bears can be hunted with firearm, archery, and crossbow equipment.

In the case of deer, populations are managed through hunting harvest to promote tree and plant regeneration that improves ecosystem diversity. Similarly, bear populations are managed through hunting harvest to reduce damage complaints from the public and negative human/bear interactions.

Small Game

Small game hunting includes the pursuit of various game birds, mammals, and furbearers. Some hunters utilize dogs to find, track, and retrieve game, particularly grouse and pheasant. Some state lands are stocked with pheasants several times each fall and are very popular destinations.



Migratory Bird

Migratory bird hunting includes hunting for waterfowl (ducks and geese) and other game birds such as dove, woodcock, snipe, and rail. Hunters utilize boats and canoes, as well as hunting dogs, to assist in this activity. Migratory game bird hunting does not require much infrastructure for upland sites; waterfowl hunting usually requires boat launches.

Turkey

Turkey hunting includes both spring and fall hunting and is limited to regulated seasons (periods). Turkey hunters desire opportunities to call-in, ambush or stalk turkeys. Apart from mentoring, most turkey hunters prefer a solitary experience and, given the wary nature of turkeys, few distractions. Even with limited numbers of harvest tags and staggered hunting periods for spring season, there is still potential for hunter overcrowding in a specific area, particularly in quality habitat areas within less abundant turkey management zones.

Notable Differences in Participation or Opportunities Across the State

Big Game

Deer hunting is very popular in Wisconsin and occurs in every county in the state. Although typically an activity occurring in rural areas, there are increasing opportunities for deer hunting in urban areas to manage high deer numbers. Wisconsin has a traditional 9-day gun deer season that draws nearly 600,000 hunters, and extended archery and crossbow harvest seasons in urban or metro deer management units.

Wisconsin continues to be a leader in providing excellent bear hunting opportunities. Most of Wisconsin's bear hunting occurs on the large tracts of public land in northern Wisconsin; however, the southern two-thirds of the state continue to support an increasing number of bears. Wisconsin uses established bear management zones and harvest permit allocation to manage hunting pressure and achieve bear population goals.

Small Game

With such a diverse array of animals to hunt in this activity, hunting pressure and techniques vary region to region. Many of the species can be found in rural habitats throughout the state. However, some species have limited ranges and habitats. For example, today's pheasant population is most common in the southeast one-third of the state and in a few west central region counties. Similar limitations are true for ruffed grouse, which prefer young, early successional forests typically found in the Central and Northern Forest Regions of the state. There also appears to be a willingness to travel more than 1 hour away on the part of small game hunting participants for these more select types of species, particularly for pheasant, ruffed grouse, and bobcat.

Migratory Bird

Wisconsin generally ranks in the top 5 for number of waterfowl hunters nationwide. Wisconsin waterfowl hunters range from those seeking the early blue-winged teal and wood duck harvest in northern marshes to the early September Canada goose hunter in the southeast, and from the Mississippi River hunter seeking canvasback in November to the later season mallard and Canada goose field hunters in central Wisconsin.



Turkey

Though found statewide, wild turkey numbers are larger in the southern half of the state. Deep, persistent snow cover and extended periods of cold temperatures have great impact on turkey populations. In Wisconsin, turkeys tend to do better where the topography is varied and mature oak/hickory woodlands are interspersed with a variety of agricultural fields.

Turkey hunting is currently divided into seven management zones within Wisconsin. These zones allow wildlife managers to set permit levels appropriate to each area based on local turkey populations, the amount of turkey habitat, and the square miles of huntable land.

Notable Times of the Year of High or Low Participation

Big Game

Avid deer hunters are planning for the hunting season all year through scouting, equipment maintenance, and habitat management. However, the majority of participation in deer hunting occurs with the onset of the archery and crossbow season in September and ends in early January. Some urban or metro deer management units provide additional archery or crossbow hunting into late January.

The bear hunting season occurs in September and October; however, people are allowed to place bait for bears beginning in mid-April. In addition, people are allowed to train their hunting hounds beginning in July.

Small Game

Highest participation follows hunting seasons and is typically fall through winter. However, there are some opportunities for year-round hunting of some animals classified as “unprotected.”

Migratory Bird

This activity is limited to regulated seasons in the fall and early winter. Hunting migratory birds is also restricted to the type of firearm and ammunition allowed and requires permits beyond a small game license.

Turkey

Participation is limited to the hunting seasons in the spring and fall, with spring typically showing higher participation. Scouting for birds may occur outside of the seasons.

Participation

Participation Rate and Frequency

Based on a 2016 survey of Wisconsin residents conducted for the development of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), it is estimated that 27% of adult Wisconsin residents participate in some form of hunting. As can be seen in the tables below, more hunting takes place on private land for all types of hunting. However, since only about 15% of the state is in public conservation land open to hunting, the density of hunters on public land is much higher than on private land.



In terms of frequency, participants that engaged in big game, small game, and migratory bird hunting did more frequently than participants in most other activities (they ranked #24, #26 and #15, respectively, in frequency out of 64 activities evaluated). Given the fact that the hunting seasons for big game and migratory birds are rather limited, this level of frequency is impressive. Turkey hunters participated less frequently (ranked #45 out of 64) but given that most people are limited to one week-long opportunity it appears that most participated on many of their available allotted days.

Hunting type	% of WI Adults that Participate	
	On Public Land	On Private Land
Big game	13%	21%
Small game	10%	14%
Migratory bird	5%	6%
Turkey	6%	11%

Big Game

Days/year	% of Hunting on Public Land	% of Hunting on Private Land
1 to 2	31	21
3 to 9	40	41
10 to 29	18	24
30 or more	12	15
Total	100%	100%

Small Game

Days/year	% of Hunting on Public Land	% of Hunting on Private Land
1 to 2	35	32
3 to 9	33	41
10 to 29	20	17
30 or more	12	10
Total	100%	100%

Migratory Bird

Days/year	% of Hunting on Public Land	% of Hunting on Private Land
1 to 2		39
3 to 9		36
10 to 29		13
30 or more		12
Total	100%	100%

Turkey

Days/year	% of Hunting on Public Land	% of Hunting on Private Land
1 to 2	38	36
3 to 9	42	51
10 to 29	15	8
30 or more	6	6
Total	100%	100%

Estimated Trends

Hunting has seen a slight decline in participation rate and this downward trend is predicted to continue. In a 2016 study by the department, three main attributes related to the decline in hunting are: one's perceived lack of time, lack of access, and declining health. Other impacts include the future of changing demographics. Increases in the minority population are expected to contribute to a decline in the percent of residents that hunt, as the overwhelming majority (95%) of hunters are Caucasian (Holsman 2016).



Demographics

As can be seen from the SCORP survey results in the tables below, participants in all types of hunting in Wisconsin tend to be older, rural men.

Big Game

Demographic Category	Demographic Group	On Public Land		On Private Land	
		% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)	% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)
Age	18-29	19	30	25	25
	30-39	14	18	26	22
	40-49	13	14	22	16
	50-59	15	21	23	20
	60-69	10	12	14	11
	70 and older	5	4	12	7
	Total	--	100	--	100
Gender	Female	7	27	10	25
	Male	20	73	32	75
	Total	--	100		
Residence	Rural	19	67	30	69
	Urban	9	33	13	31
	Total	--	100	--	100

Small Game

Demographic Category	Demographic Group	On Public Land		On Private Land	
		% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)	% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)
Age	18-29	16	33	18	26
	30-39	10	19	18	23
	40-49	11	16	16	16
	50-59	10	19	13	18
	60-69	5	8	9	11
	70 and older	5	6	7	6
	Total	--	100	--	100
Gender	Female	5	25	8	27
	Male	15	75	21	73
	Total	--	100		
Residence	Rural	14	66	20	69
	Urban	7	34	8	31
	Total	--	100	--	100



Migratory Bird

Demographic Category	Demographic Group	On Public Land		On Private Land	
		% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)	% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)
Age	18-29	12	45	15	51
	30-39	5	18	6	17
	40-49	5	13	6	13
	50-59	4	14	3	10
	60-69	1	3	1	4
	70 and older	4	7	3	3
	Total	--	100	--	100
Gender	Female	3	30	3	27
	Male	8	73	9	73
	Total	--	100		
Residence	Rural	7	60	8	62
	Urban	4	40	5	38
	Total	--	100	--	100

Turkey

Demographic Category	Demographic Group	On Public Land		On Private Land	
		% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)	% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)
Age	18-29	14	50	17	33
	30-39	6	17	11	19
	40-49	4	11	11	14
	50-59	4	13	11	18
	60-69	2	6	7	11
	70 and older	2	3	5	5
	Total	--	100	--	100
Gender	Female	3	30	6	27
	Male	8	70	16	73
	Total	--	100		
Residence	Rural	8	65	15	69
	Urban	4	35	6	31
	Total	--	100	--	100

References

Holsman, R.H. 2016. *What the Evidence Suggests for the Future of Fishing and Hunting License Sales in Wisconsin*. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Madison, WI.

